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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO

January 26, 1956

THE SOIL CONSERVATION JOB IN 1956

I. Last August the Administrator cabled me in Pakistan asking if I would come to Puerto Rico as Territorial Conservationist. January 3, 1956 I took over the duties of Administrator of Soil Conservation Service functions in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. I am looking forward to an interesting and, I hope, very pleasant experience. After I have been here several more months, I hope to meet all of you at your field offices and spend some time actually acquainting myself with operations in the field. In a reasonable period of time you should become well acquainted with all of the new staff members in San Juan. During 1956 all of us expect to spend as much time with you as good planning and effective scheduling will permit.

We are going to develop schedules and work plans for all of the staff here so that our time and assistance will be as effective to you as we can make it.

We scheduled this conference for a number of very important reasons. There are a number of major items in the fields of

Discussion by R. L. von Trebra, Director, at a Work Unit and Specialists' Staff Conference January 26, 27, 1956



administration and operations that we need to discuss as a group. In this conference we will discuss Program needs and in-service functions. It is essential that we all have a thorough understanding of the problems discussed and decisions reached. This understanding is essential if we are to work effectively and do a "team job."

The best trained technicians can not do their job in the right way unless they are supported by good administration. In contrast, good administration is not enough. We cannot have a good operations program unless all of us well understand the major needs and problems of good administration and sound operations.

Every one of us is in a line or staff position. In a line-staff organization, the flow of administration or authority in the Caribbean Area is from the Director to the Work Unit Conservationists. These two positions are administrative. All other positions are staff positions. Work Unit Conservationists are administrators. They represent the Service at the district or work unit level. They are in charge of Service administrative functions. All personnel attached to a work unit are administratively responsible to the work unit conservationist.

- II. At this conference we are going to discuss a lot of problems that will vitally affect the success of our work in 1956 and may be for years to come. I want to urge each of you to pay close attention to every subject being discussed. You should take careful notes. If you are not absolutely sure you understand what is

being discussed in this conference, I urge that you immediately ask for further explanation at any time. It is no reflection on anyone to say, "I don't know." If you ask questions - we can get answers. This is a conference designed to benefit all of us. Do not be ashamed if you do not understand. You cannot afford to leave here until each of you ~~does~~ understand. Some of us may use terms or phrases that are unfamiliar to others. Some of us do not speak Spanish. We are all supposed to understand and use English. However, some of you field men are more in the habit of speaking in Spanish and for that reason, some of our remarks may not always be clear. Let's be sure that we understand each other and the subject under discussion.

I would like to briefly discuss a number of items on which we need to place major emphasis in this conference. These are:

1. WE ARE ALL CONSERVATIONISTS:

Every technical employee of the SCS in the Caribbean Area should first consider himself a conservationist rather than a specialist. We are here to do a conservation job; it requires TEAMWORK by everyone. We must first look at all field problems from the viewpoint of the total job to be done - the total problem that exists - then we start working at the job by tackling the individual phases or conservation measures that good judgment requires. "Team work" means our ability to do our job working as a team. Each of us has special skills and special

responsibilities. By exchanging information, consulting with each other, and applying the best available technique to doing the job, we will be working as a team. We will make fewer mistakes. We will do better and more effective work. We will constantly be training each other.

This is "TEAM WORK."

2. PREPARATION OF WORK LOAD ANALYSIS

During the past two weeks all of you have been preparing the district work load analysis. Let me briefly state the importance of these WLA.

- (a) We must estimate the kind and amount of work we expect to do before we can develop schedules and plans for 1956 operations.
- (b) Schedules are necessary before we can work effectively. They are necessary in order to schedule needed assistance in training or any other activity involving Service people. A good WLA is a sound basis for developing schedules.
- (c) We must have a WLA showing the amount and kind of work to be done before we can prepare safe and sound estimates for operating budgets. All operations of the SCS in the Carib. Area are based on the expenditure of public funds - money appropriated by Congress. We have to be able to tell Congress how much money we need to operate with before it can be appropriated. A careful estimate, district by district, of the district work

load and the number of personnel needed to do the job, is necessary before budget estimates can be made.

3. INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

We must give more attention and thought to this important part of our functional responsibility. Every one of you should be alert to the opportunity to keep the public informed on the progress of work. Good results from the use of conservation practices on district cooperators' farms should become public knowledge and information. District supervisors need your help in organizing tours, meetings, and district activities. See to it that district supervisors get all the publicity possible in the affairs and interests of the district. Use your imagination, ingenuity and resourcefulness to develop a good information program. Part of your effectiveness as an employee is determined by your ability to develop an effective information and education program.

4. STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE

Each of you should have a standard of performance. If you do not have, then it is imperative that one be developed very soon. In simple, understandable terms it should state:

- (a) Four major duties and responsibilities
- (b) And what is an acceptable or satisfactory performance of those duties.

This standard of performance should be developed by you and mutually agreed to by you and your supervisor. I hope time and schedules permit this office to review your performance with you at least once during mid-year 1956. In some cases it may be advisable to have interim or 90 day standard of performance reviews for some positions. It is the privilege of every employee to have, in writing, the requirements of his or her job and the quality of performance expected of the position. It is also the responsibility of all administrative officers to review the standards for the job with the employee and evaluate the quality of the performance of the employee on the job. If performance and quality of work is not up to standards, then the employee must be given additional training to improve his performance or be demoted or separated. Performance ratings may be given at any time by the administrator.

III. FARM PLANNING - FACILITATING AND APPLICATION TIME:

- (a) In many districts there are 800-1000 Farm Plans
- (b) There has been an average yearly production of 60 to 90 basic plans per district
- (c) How much application and maintenance of conservation practices actually exists on these farms under agreement?
- (d) Are we over emphasizing the production of farm plans?

Surveys in the past clearly show that new cooperators must be contacted enough times in the first two to three years to

assure application. If contacts are not maintained, a majority of farmers are "lost."

- (e) Our job is to develop "conservation farmers."
- (f) Without an increase in district staff, how do we plan to get farmers to maintain conservation measures if we continue to plan at the same rate, year after year.
- (g) We need to classify district cooperators - possibly three classes - good, fair, and poor. After classification of cooperators, then schedules for contacting these cooperators need to be developed to get the needed application of conservation practices on the land.
- (h) In developing our annual work load analysis and preparing our schedules for the year's operation, we need to be realistic about conditions and workloads and the WLA should adequately reflect what these conditions are.

IV. REPORTS

- (a) Monthly work unit reports from districts should contain more than data on application of practices. For example, we need more information than a brief mention of a meeting. The monthly work unit report is your opportunity to clearly state what is happening in the district in the way of progress of work, new developments, problems that have arisen, relationship problems between agencies or groups, etc. The reports can be an excellent means of briefly stating the type and the amount of training that has been done, the training that might be needed by some individual or a reference to the

training assistance that might be needed from the central staff to the field. The monthly reports are an excellent opportunity for you to mention administrative functions on which you need assistance. Information and educational accomplishments should be mentioned. Anticipated activities of interest or affecting the work of the staff should be mentioned.

- (b) We intend to summarize monthly progress reports. The summary will contain, besides progress data, timely comments on general and specific operations activities by districts and for all of the Caribbean Area.
- (c) From time to time the summary may mention good performance of individuals and work units.
- (d) Reports can be made interesting and valuable to you.
- (e) Reports can just as well be colorful and interesting to read, instead of containing drab statistical information of little interest or value to anyone.
- (f) I need timely information from you in your monthly reports for my monthly report to Washington.

V. COMMITTEE ON TRAINING, SAFETY AND AWARDS

- (a) All work unit inspections in 1955 showed a need for greater emphasis on training.
- (b) The summaries clearly showed some training is needed in every phase of service functions for all personnel.
- (c) We must find ways and means for proper scheduling to get our training needs taken care of.

(d) I want you to understand some of the requirements of my job and the jobs of others.

In turn, I must understand your job and your problems.

(e) Our training program will help to accomplish these objectives.

SAFETY

Safety is the responsibility of all of us. We must be safety-conscious. Accidents are too costly in lost man-days and in work accomplishments, besides the personal cost involved for anyone who has an accident.

AWARDS

The Department has set up awards for meritorious service. The award program has been in existence 8 to 10 years. This committee will, as one of its responsibilities, review the accomplishments of an individual who has been recommended for an award. It is the responsibility of every line officer and supervisor to recognize when an award for good service is justified. Because of this responsibility, you have to initiate, in writing, the reasons why you think an award should be considered. The committee will recommend appropriate rewards for those individuals who have demonstrated superior accomplishments. Awards may be in the form of cash, letters of recognition and commendation from the Secretary.

I expect the Committee on Training, Safety and Awards to take other assignments from time to time. For example, there is the problem of morale and working relationships throughout the Service. There are numerous activities, changes or possibly adjustments in routine matters which, if changed, might mean considerable to the improvement

in working relations and better understanding by all personnel of the Service. Each of you is urged to send any suggestions you wish to the committee chairman for consideration.

Let me emphasize that I hope that every employee of the SCS in the Caribbean Area will feel that he or she has complete freedom to offer suggestions on any subject at any time for the improvement and betterment of our organization.



